

DALIT WOMEN POETS AND NEW THEMES IN POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Dalit writing is always coming forward for asking their natural right. The question of identity and equality is dominant theme in writings of Dalit writers. Especially, if themselves are the sufferers. All this started from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision. Dalit Poetry is not the exception to this. Though very few writers are successful to publish their works in book form, it is worth mentioning their names in the canon of World Poetic Literature. My topic will focus on the poets and their works in general and how they are expressing their agonies in the context of poetry. Based on caste, race, class and occupational questions this paper will give the background of the respective poets in the light of explanation. Dalit Women's problems are much more different from the mainstream women. The autobiographical note we observe in their poetry is the sign of difference between the two classes of women. My paper will focus on the Dalit Movement and Dalit Poetry especially from Maharashtra, which is also the home place for Dalit Movements all over the India.

KEYWORDS: Dalit Writing, Poetry, Women Poets

INTRODUCTION

The word 'Dalit' means a member of the caste that is considered lowest and that has fewest advantages (*Oxford Advance Learner Dictionary*, p. 383). Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar (1891-1956), never like to use the word 'Dalit', rather he used the word-'depressed classes', the word derived from Sanskrit and it means the suppressed, crushed or broken to pieces. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule was the first who used this word in connection with caste. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision was in the tradition of the Buddha, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule, and Shahu Maharaj. These great social reformers inspire Dalit black third world women. Buddha (6th century BC), Chokhamela (14th century AD), Mahatma Phule (1827-90) and Prof. S. M. Mate (1886-1957) held to be the originators of the Dalit Literature. But while speaking historically it is Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar who showed depthful concern about the Dalits and Dalit literature.

The term 'Dalit Literature' can be traced back to the first Dalit Literary Conference in 1958, which went almost unnoticed. In the sixties, many new things happened in Marathi Literature. For the first time in Marathi literature, the poet Narayan Surve came forward. The Angry Young Men concept started to take roots in Dalit Literature. By that time, Anna Bhau Sathe and Shashankarrao Kharat were already established and the background was almost prepared for the new themes. Moreover, during this time the collection of short stories 'Jevha Me Jat Chorali Hoti' (When I Concealed My Caste) by Baburao Bagul had established Dalit Literature on some high note giving way out to systematize their experiences and feelings.

In seventies Dalit critics started to notice Dalit literature and its role. Many famous writers bloomed in this period including Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Tryambak Sapkale, Arjun Dangale, Namdeo Dhasal and many others. In the background of all these, the political vision of Dr Ambedkar did not get materialized. However, with respect to the black movement and literature in the USA the youths like Namdeo Dasal, Arjun Dangale and J. V. Pawar took the initiative and established the political movement called the DALIT PANTHERS in Mumbai (1972). It was the first time in India that the leaders were all creative and active writers and the followers of Dr Ambedkar (Dangale, Arjun. *No Entry for the New Sun*. Introduction).

Dr Ambedkar always said that the depressed classes should raise their education standard so that they may know their own conditions, have aspirations to rise to the level of highest Hindu and be in position to use political power as a mean to an end. Inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's vision those who get education raised their standard comparatively high. Such educated lot started to express their agonies through their writing. By the time of eighties, many such Dalit writers forget that Dalit literature is not just the literature but it is a part of Dr. Ambedkar's vision. Modern Dalit Women writers not only show the concern about Dr Ambedkar and his movement but also about the education and social upliftment in various manners. They follow the message of Dr Ambedkar, 'Educate, Agitate, and Organize: Have faith in your strength.'

Considering the small span of the year's Dalit women get to bloom, they achieved a lot. Their first significant achievement is their education and the second is their consistence progressive writing. While Dalit Women Poets are struggling to justify with their identities in their poems, mainstream poets are talking about love, patriarchy, equality, beauty, religion, myths and legends, social class, heritage, consciousness, position, children, food, economy, etc. Dalit poets concern is more liberal and autobiographical compare to other modern poets. Their poetry is their past and present and future hence it is rebellious as well as reflective in nature. To start with the rebellious group one must mention the first ever-rebellious poet from Maharashtra Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule. She guide to her daughters to take education, be self-reliant and be industrious. Just like Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, her husband Savitribai Phule is guiding the women of her time to work, gather wisdom and riches. She furthers adds that everything will be lost if we are not educated and it is education which gives us the wisdom and make us human. So, she says to her fellow sisters not to sit idle and get education so that they can end the misery of oppressed and forsaken. Her message to the women of her time is a revolutionary idea of a radical feminist. She says -

"You've got a golden chance to learn

So learn and break the chains of caste.

Throw away the Brahman's scriptures fast."

-Savitribai Phule (<http://roundtableindia.co.in>)

The message of motivation and guidance reflects through every single line of the poetry by the great social reformer, the first Indian Woman Teacher and a radical feminist. The way Savitribai Phule asking women to through the Brahman Scripture is highly appraisable. Here, she is rebelling against the culture that had denied women's freedom and right to take education. Following Savitribai, many poets after 1970 came forward to express their liberal views and commitment to the movement. One of them is **Hira Bansode**. She is the representer of first and second generations of Dalit educated women who had completed their education after a lot of struggle. In her poem, *Sanskriti* Hira Bansode rebels against the great culture of India. She declared the country as an evil step-mother who is treating her own child as an

inferior. She bluntly rebels against the great culture of her mother land and says, “To hell with you!” She recollect the days when the schoolbooks taught her to sung sweetly of her motherland for carrying most ancient and the lofty culture of the world, with addition to that they ask her to honour motherland again and again. But, today when she contemplate on her social status given by the great culture of her motherland she says-

“But today the schoolbook’s lies infuriate me.

We are ashamed to call you mother.

You may be a mother to some, but to us you are an evil step-mother.”

-*TWICE DALIT: The poetry of Hira Bansode*

Dr. Jyoti Lanjewar is a poet from Nagpur, who recently passed away. Her poem *Caves* gives the rebellious tone against the social inequalities of dominant society. Through her poem she expressed that she had been silent all these days and was listening the voice of right and wrong. But, now she got the truth behind her communities existing status. She asks the simple question to the culture which was responsible for holding backward classes on such a filthy place. After examining such pitiful condition of her community she says this land was never mother to us -

“Which never gave us even the life of cats and dogs?

I hold their unpardonable sins as witness

And turn here and now, a rebel.”

- Poisoned Bread (P. 26)

She chooses the path where she can fight for the human rights. Her lines are portraying the picture of transformation from a normal traditional Dalit woman into a modern revolutionary woman. **Aasha Thorat** from Amravati is also the one who gets inspiration from Dr. Ambedkar’s vision. Dr. Ambedkar’s ‘*Buddha and his Dhamma*’ inspired her to write the following poem. In this poem, she simply asked the prejudiced peoples to take back their belongings. She further ask such peoples to come to her Veruvan (a place where Buddha meditate) for eternal solace-

“Take back your Goddesses

Take back your curses

Take back your caste

If you want, come to our white Bamboo forest (Veruvan)”

- ‘Amhi Suryachya Leki’; (Translation done by me)

Mrs. Thorat here is voicing the voiceless. **Prabha Nikunje** from Dhule talks about rebellious Taslima Nasreen in her poem. For her Taslima Bano is the common voice of the tethered Women bound in the shackles of scriptures and grilling over innocent questions before the great culture. Like Taslima Nasreen she is form on the opinion that it is the culture which is responsible for the discrimination. She further says -

“Taslima Bano you stand against the Hindu cultural approach

Why Hindu women get blessing of hundred sons?

The question hanging in your mind

Sister, why such discrimination will not be there?"

- 'AmhiSuryachyaLeki'; (Translation done by me)

Sandhya Rangari from Nanded is another daring, audacious and courageous woman from Dalit background. She strongly states that the death of Dr Ambedkar had divided Dalits in India. New leaders according to their convenience had divided every caste. Within the Dalit community, Mang/ Matang caste people followed Annabhau Sathe more than Dr Ambedkar. While doing all this, their aim was to gain power; to get the place in politics. She exposes the contemporary chaotic and pathetic condition of the Dalit organizations. Dalit Panthers is one of such organizations. She mocks at the pitiful situation Dalit Panther is having now and ironically relate it with the real jungle panther that started to survive on the grass. She starts her poem with a direct question, "What PANTHER after all you eat the grass?" She further adduces the fact with a famous saying that if the stomach of animals is paining they eat grass. She relates this indigestion with Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy, vision and says it is too hard to digest him as he is too hard for normal people's wisdom. She further says that-

"That's why your own Bhim

You made empty

It is said that a Mahar got one penny and Mahar walks dancingly..."

- 'AmhiSuryachyaLeki'; (Translation done by me)

The reflections of the accomplishments, adopting and modifying are many a time remains a subject matter of Dalit poetry. Many modern Dalit Women poets choose to write praiseworthy poems. In that group, it is fit to put the poems of the following poets.

Prof. MaltiIngale is from Nagpur and teaching Marathi Literature in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar College, Dikshbhumi, Nagpur. Her life is the constant source of inspiration to many of her students. Her anthology of nearly seventy-seven poems named '*Blue Sky Is Mine*' is nothing but the innermost core of her heart kept open before us. She tries to guide the Bhim (Dr. Ambedkar's) followers through the following lines from her poem *Blue Sky Blue Morning*. Here the Blue colour is having the significance of liberty, and it is the most preferred color by the Ambedkarite's. She urges her Bhim brothers and sisters to gather under the blessed Bhim roof of humanity and create a new thinking through teaching the lessons of humanity-

"Come my Bhim brothers and sisters

Under this blue sky

Under this Bhim roof....."

- *Blue Sky Is Mine. P.28-29* (Translation done by me)

Daya Pawar's daughter **Pradhnya Pawar** is the most acclaimed of today's young Marathi poets. She started trying her hand in poetry from her high school years and since then the poetry flows from her heart like a stream. As a daughter of Daya Pawar she says that she never had to search for inspiration from outside. Her poetry relates her feelings

with new questions; in the following lines too she is answering one such shallow question. Here, the answer is for baselessness of emotions in the eyes of an interviewer, who in spite of focusing on the pain and sufferings of a Dalit poet and her community gives attention to the physical amenities. But she ostracizes his questions and gives way to her effusions dramatically-

“I said, yes, sure
What you want to see?
See this huge back of earth
I am sitting on it, like this
And, hold the sky in my emotions.”

- ‘AmhiSuryachyaLeki’; (Translation done by me)

Kavita Mokhankar from Mumbai is betoken of Modern Dalit young poet, who lives in the Metro city; travels in Mumbai’s locals and give reflection of all these experiences in her poetry with a modern touch. In the following poem, she expresses basic truth of society that one can afford to forget the caste and class discrimination if the need occurs. It is a touching poem coming out of a crowded city called Mumbai. She shares her experience of travelling by a crowded train where everyone is in hurry to reach home early. In the haste they inhale each other as they don’t have fear of pollution. She is partly satisfied as she affords to forget her caste here and so she sits closure to the adjusting person whom she calls a human being. Her innocent heart’s response to the feeling is beyond words-

“And train moves forward taking human beings
Those who forget their caste
Towards the path of equality....”

- ‘Amhi Suryachya Leki’; (Translation done by me)

Pratibha Ahire from Aurangabad is a zestful movement poet. Her poetry according to her is a rally against the inequality and discriminations in the society. In the following poem, she is following the path of Dr. Ambedkar and is ready to die for the great cause. Such spirit is common characteristic among the Dalit poets work. She in her poem says that when she is walking on the path of Dr Ambedkar her eyes stab on the blue sky and she holds the constitution in her hand and slogan in her heart. She sings her song boldly like-

“When I am following your path Bhima
Let me face the death
For your slogan Bhima
Let my life get fired”

- ‘AmhiSuryachyaLeki’; (Translation done by me)

In *Yashodhara*, **Hira Bansode** talks about the status of Yashodhara, the wife of Siddhartha. Through Yashodhara, Mrs. Bansode reflects here the entire women community’s suffering bluntly. She reveals the hidden

truth of Yashodhara's life that how she was like a dream of sharp pain and lifelong sorrow which give no audacity to look at her pathetic situation. The Buddha enlightened everyone in the world but it is Yashodhara who suffer and absorb the darkness until her last-

"But you absorb the dark
Until your life was mottled blue and black,
A fragmented life, burned out..."

-*'TWICE DALIT: The poetry of Hira Bansode'*

In the above lines, Mrs. Bansode gives the image of Yashodhara as a wife who left to live a fragmented life. Here the Dalit woman poet is questioning the treatment of inequality within the movement. In the last stanza of the same poem, she dares to question the social neglect Yashodhara has faced and says:

"I am ashamed of the injustice.
You are not found
In a single Buddhist Vihara.
Were you really of no account?"

-*'TWICE DALIT: The poetry of Hira Bansode'*

Kusum Aatram from Gadchiroli, a naxalite area of Maharashtra, is a Tribal Dalit Woman poet. Through her poem, she is reflecting the Tribal Women's contemporary pathetic and chaotic condition. In the poem she portrayed a character of a young tribal girl who was the pride of her father and was the queen in her youthful dreams. But, one day her village was attacked by the naxalites and every woman's dignity was demolished on that day. In the poem the girl is asking the innocent question to the sisters working in the Women Movement-

"Today I am their Dropadi
Oh! My sisters those from the Women's Movements
Can you stop me from becoming a Bandit Queen?"

- 'AmhiSuryachyaLeki'; (Translation done by me)

Here, the voice of a tribal girl is representing many such untold agonies. Such stories, many a time are true and trustworthy. **Surekha Bhagat** from Amravati is the woman who gets inspired by the Ambedkarite movement and had high hopes from life, which were unfortunately crushed under the dominance of patriarchy. Her poem is the reflection of harsh conditions a Dalit woman has to face in the family life and how the natural right to progress is denied from her birth. In the poem she gives description of the things a woman can do if she leaves back her feminine hesitation. According to her a man always sees the woman's eyes as beautiful but they deny its power of vision. A man always counts her beauty by her physical status like her lips but not the capacity of words they can utter. Her delicate legs are the symbol of feminine sensuality with which they can walk slowly but they never see horizons they can conquer. Her fingers to a man are tokens of delicacy while they have power to guide. Observing all such abhorrent acts Mrs. Bhagat finally declares such shallow assumptions wrong and says-

“Your overall shallow assumption was wrong

Inside me is flowing wild wind of my forever release...”

- ‘AmhiSuryachyaLeki’; (Translation done by me)

Chhaya Chakranarayan from Murtijapur is a woman from a very poor background who has suffered by the hand of the politicians and has courage enough to say against such hypocrites. She talk about the burning issues of female feticides in her poem and have deep feelings that for such issues women are somehow responsible too. The story she is sharing through her poem here is of a woman who is waiting for a son and have five abortions done. Such woman thought that their womb is like a fertile black land and mean for progeny. Such Mothers and their love hide back while doing abortion of a girl. Rather than giving her love they through her in drain without any hesitation and shame. When the time for second girl comes they cry Ganges and Yamuna. It is a story of every household in India that they want son for their name as they think that the creepers on the door will remain green because of a son and so they snatch away the right of a girl to come in this beautiful world. When Mrs. Chakranarayan contemplate on such issues she firmly believes that it is woman who is responsible for such things no matter she belong to twenty first century-

“Before everyone else, mother is ready to do such thing

For bringing doom on women, women’s are responsible.”

- ‘AmhiSuryachyaLeki’ (Translation done by me)

According to Nimbalkar, “The literature of Adivasis, vagrant and nomadic tribes, backward class people, workers, laborers, all exploited and afflicted, stricken people is Dalit literature.” (Nimbalkar, *Dalit Literature: Its Nature and Role*, p. 68). Considering the above mentioned definition of Dalit Literature we come to an assumption that it is through the movement Dalit Literature has created the new horizons in the Marathi and other Literature. The message shared by such Dalit poets and writers is to bring revolution. All these Dalit Women Poets so far discussed in the paper are somewhere in their heart are truthful to what they are speaking. They lack artificiality, imaginary concepts, romanticization that could be one of their plus points to stand erect on their views, no wonder it sounds autobiographical.

Dalit literature in the hands of modern women’s writers has gone through a multidimensional change. Adjudging new themes and concepts it hardly remains the literature of depressed classes. These modern poets writing is not only the writing of lamentation, breast-beating, praising or even contemplation but also feminist, reflective and universal. By representing universal themes in their writing, they have taken the movement of Dr Ambedkar on a high peak. Their community as well as Dalit Writers from first and second generations has high hopes from these Modern Dalit Women poets. Finally to end I would like to quote Dr Ambedkar who said, “I measure the progress of the community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.”

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